

Warmer, Fuzzier: The Refreshed Logo

By **BILL MARSH**

THE WORLD ECONOMY is in mid-swan dive. Wallets are in lockdown. So how does a company get people to feel just a little bit better about buying more stuff? (And perhaps burnish a brand that has taken some public relations lumps?)

Behold the new breed of corporate logo — non-threatening, reassuring, playful, even child-like. Not emblems of distant behemoths, but faces of friends.

“A logo is to a company what a face is to a person,” said Michel Tuan Pham, a professor of marketing at the Columbia Business School. “It’s hard to memorize facts about a person when you only know their name but you haven’t seen their face.” So logos remind consumers about companies’ traits and pluck at emotions, “the glue that ties all the information about the brand name together,” Mr. Pham said.

The economy, environment, image repair — new logos may address all of these. They are also meant to stand out in a crowd, but there are striking similarities among recent redesigns.

TONED-DOWN TYPE Bold, block capital letters are out. Their replacements are mostly or entirely lower case, softening the stern voice of corporate authority to something more like an informal chat.

“Logos have become less official-looking and more conversational,” said

Patti Williams, a professor of marketing at the University of Pennsylvania’s Wharton School. “They’re not yelling. They’re inviting. They’re more neighborly.”

Blogs and e-mail, Ms. Williams said, may be encouraging a quieter, calmer, lower-case branding vernacular. Who isn’t tired of screeds that assault the reader via THE CAPS LOCK KEY?

Here are two remakes:

Wal-Mart before  and after

Kraft before  and after

Letterforms are lighter and rounder — an extended family of homogenized fonts that would be comfortable on a local newsletter or generic Web page.

FRIENDLY FLOURISHES Kraft Foods has joined Amazon.com and Hasbro, all represented by logos that smile. And to further lighten the corporate mood, whimsy in the form of sprigs and bursts has been appended to several big brands.



Wal-Mart’s old mark was navy blue, but it felt Red State. The company has

been under heavy attack for its labor and environmental practices, bruising its brand in bluer quarters.

A major image overhaul is under way, and a new logo is starting to appear across the country. The military-style Wal-Mart star has given way to a yellow twinkle that punctuates a new message: this is a company that cares, with fast and friendly service and a fresh, innovative outlook, according to Linda Blakley, a Wal-Mart spokeswoman.

HAPPIER COLORS “The economy is the No. 1 influence this year,” said John H. Bredenfoerder, a color expert and design director at Landor Associates, the brand-consulting company that produced the new Cheer detergent emblem. Amid all the gloom, he said, “people need a little joy in their lives.” Cue the new logos: electric blue type with accents in school bus yellow, red, purple, orange and green.



Last year’s top influence, green for sustainability, remains; leaves still sprout across the corporate landscape.

Mr. Bredenfoerder said that blue was also gaining as a stand-in for the environment (think of earth’s blue orb as seen from space, or clear blue waters) as well as for fresh optimism. But please, make it a joyful sky blue — not dark, corporate-titan navy.

Signs of Change

THEN



NOW



With little fanfare, **Wal-Mart** began replacing its commanding all-capitals logo with lighter blue text in September, punctuated by what the company calls a “spark.”

The food giant **Kraft** unveiled a new corporate identity, with a smile and “flavor burst,” in February. Its old racetrack-shaped, block-capitals emblem remains on packaging.

The compressed black letters on the old **Cheer** detergent logo appeared to squint. Bouncy new blue “ee” twins seem to laugh under a colorful spray.

Loud typography and hard edges on **Stop & Shop**’s logo gave way to lower-case type and colorful wedges.

Superfresh, a mid-Atlantic grocer, has been rolling out a leaf-sprouting logo as it renovates its stores.

The old **Sysco** box logo — cleverly spelling out the food supplier’s name — made way for three newly popular features: sky-blue type, a green leaf and a warmly worded tagline.

Last year **Quick Chek**, a chain of food stores, began a five-year rollout of a new all-green emblem.

Wild West typography, a rifle sight, menacing claws: **Blackwater**, the private security company under scrutiny for its involvement in Iraqi civilian deaths, had an unhelpful emblem. The damaged name was abandoned in February, becoming a more neutral Xe (pronounced zee).